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SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
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USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#). Mideast
- [2](#). Iran: Nuclear Program

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Key stories in the media:  
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Israel Radio reported that the IDF responded with artillery fire and aerial strikes to Sunday's Qassam fire. A Qassam rocket nearly missed a kindergarten in Kibbutz Sa'ad near the Gaza Strip on Monday. Ha'aretz reported that the IDF is planning more aggressive action in the northern Gaza Strip. Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that today the IDF is expected to scatter flyers in the northern Gaza Strip, urging residents to leave the area. According to Israel Radio, Israel demands that PA policemen evacuate the area. The radio said that this was the first step in the creation of a buffer zone. Yediot quoted PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas as saying that the PA's policemen will not abandon positions in the northern Gaza Strip. This morning, Israel Radio quoted Israeli security sources as denying that the Palestinians have rockets with a 15- to 25-km range, as had been publicized by Fatah's military branch during the weekend. Ha'aretz quoted Uri Dekel, Director of the IDF's Strategic Planning Division, as saying on Monday that Hamas is expected to tone down its terror activity if it wins the Palestinian legislative elections.

Yediot bannered Sharon's medical file as it was released on Monday. The media, which noted that his health is on the whole satisfactory, quoted senior physicians at Jerusalem's Hadassah Ein Karem Hospital as saying Monday that Sharon will in two weeks undergo a catheterization to insert a clam shell-shaped clamp on two sides of a small hole in his heart. The procedure will prevent the formation of more blood clots and greatly reduce his risk of a recurrent stroke. The media quoted the physicians as saying that when Sharon arrived at the hospital on Sunday last week, he was unable to communicate and was unable to make decisions.

The Jerusalem Post reported that PA officials hinted on Monday that next month's parliamentary elections might be postponed because of the ongoing power struggle in Fatah and because of Israel's objection to the participation of Jerusalem Arabs. (See results of poll below.) On Monday, Hatzofe reported that representatives of the U.S. administration, who have met with their Israeli counterparts over the past few days in order to discuss the Palestinian elections, have demanded that Israel permit ballot boxes to be placed in East Jerusalem. Hatzofe wrote that one of the "official" U.S. representatives who have approached Israel is former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who is supposed to serve as a monitor for the elections on behalf of the US and the EU. Carter reportedly sent a letter to Prime Minister Sharon this week, demanding that the East Jerusalem Arabs be permitted to vote for

the Palestinian parliament as was done in 1996. On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior GOI official as saying Saturday that Israel is now inclined to allow East Jerusalem Arabs to participate in the Palestinian legislative elections. On Sunday, Ha'aretz quoted sources in the Israeli military establishment as saying that Abbas is at an all-time political low since taking over from Yasser Arafat in November 2004. The newspaper cited the belief of some Israeli intelligence officials that Abbas is considering resigning.

On Sunday, Yediot cited "confidential reports" that have recently reached the senior political echelon in Jerusalem, according to which the U.S. administration has grown "weary" of Abbas and that it is disappointed in him. The newspaper quoted one U.S. official as saying in a conversation with a senior Israeli official: "We have gone back to the Arafat days -- only without Arafat." Yediot reported that the first signs the Americans were "sobering up" were discernible in the actions of A/S David Welch. The newspaper quoted senior political sources in Jerusalem as saying that Welch reprimanded Abbas, and that Welch told him: "Stop trying to walk between the raindrops. You are not honoring your commitments."

On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post reported that the U.S. Congress has approved a USD 600-million assistance package for joint defense projects, in addition to the annual U.S. aid Israel receives. The newspaper wrote that the main component in the package, which includes several projects that are being developed and manufactured by both countries, is the Arrow anti-missile system.

Maariv cited intelligence that reached the Israeli defense establishment, according to which Iran has already started actions needed to enrich uranium. The newspaper quoted outgoing IDF Intelligence chief Maj. Gen Aharon Zeevi-Farkash as saying during a farewell meeting with Sharon that the diplomatic option vis-a-vis Iran is vanishing.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Likud Chairman Knesset Member Binyamin Netanyahu as saying Monday at a Likud Central Committee meeting that his "defensible borders" would include the Jordan Valley, the Golan, an undivided Jerusalem, settlements blocs in the West Bank and the hilltops overlooking Ben Gurion Airport, the Gush Dan (greater Tel Aviv) region and Route 443 (the northern access road from the coastal plain to Jerusalem).

Israel Radio reported that on Monday, Attorney Talia Sasson, who wrote the report on unauthorized settler outposts, sharply criticized the Civil Administration in the Territories' involvement in the settlement policy in the West Bank. Ha'aretz reported that the Civil Administration, with the blessing of the State Prosecutor's Office, has been a key partner in real estate deals that would turn Palestinian property into Israel's state land. Ha'aretz reported that on Monday, the Jerusalem committee of the Zionist Council in Israel recommended that an emphasis be placed on developing Jerusalem beyond the Green Line, toward the north, south, and east. Ha'aretz reported that on Monday, the Housing and Construction Ministry released tenders for the construction of 228 housing units in the West Bank: 150 units in Betar Illit and 78 units in the Givat Hazait neighborhood in Efrat.

Meretz Chairman Yossi Beilin was quoted as saying on Israel Radio on Monday that his party intends to be a part of the new government to take office after the March elections, even if Sharon is elected to head it.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz quoted people who demonstrated against the separation fence near the West Bank village of Beilin on Friday as saying that police beat one Israeli and one Palestinian protester while they were in restraints.

On Sunday, Maariv reported that in a series of interviews with the London based newspaper Al-Hayat, the national Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, issued a call to end suicide bombing attacks that are committed amid the civilian population, saying that they were detrimental to the Palestinians.

On Monday, all media reported that on Sunday, IDF Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan (reserves) unveiled his new party Tafnit, which is to focus on social issues.

Ha'aretz cited statistics for 2005 released by the Jewish Agency, according to which the number of immigrants from Western countries has hit a record high, although overall immigration is stabilizing.

Some 23,000 people have moved to Israel this year, 4 percent more than in 2004. By contrast, immigration from North American has risen by 15 percent since last year and immigration from France has risen by 23 percent in the same period.

Ha'aretz reported that "after days of taking a pounding in the press," the Israeli airline on Monday withdrew its objections to broadcasting the Channel -2 TV's investigative journalism show of the near collision on the ground at JFK Airport in New York, which involved an Israir plane.

Leading media cited a poll conducted by al-Najah University in Nablus among Palestinians and published on Monday, according to which Hamas was expected to win 31.4 percent on the vote in the parliamentary elections. Jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti's al-Mustaqbal list came in second with 26.8 percent. The official Fatah list received only 17.7 percent. Some media cited polls showing that Fatah might get more than 45 percent if united.

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**1. Mideast:**  
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Summary:  
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Regional correspondent Ronni Shaked wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "There is only one reason for the Qassam rocket fire ... to bring about the cancellation of the Palestinian elections."

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of Yediot Aharonot: "Delaying the [Palestinian legislative] elections ... would only allow the lie of Fatah's regime to exist for a little while longer. Until the explosion, which, at that point, will be inevitable."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Hamas wants to be Israel's next 'no partner.'"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "For all practical purposes, it is already all over for Abbas."

The Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Until the West demands reformist policies throughout the region ... it will be left to wonder why it must continuously choose between the autocrats and the Islamists."

Block Quotes:  
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**1. "Political Qassam Rocket"**

Regional correspondent Ronni Shaked wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 27): "There is only one reason for the Qassam rocket fire and the combative statements of the terror organizations about shelling Ashkelon and Ofakim: to bring about the cancellation of the Palestinian elections.... Who is opposed to a security escalation? Hamas. This is not about love for Israel, but mainly about the fact that the Hamas operatives are certain of their victory in the elections, and fear that the Qassam rockets could steal their political victory.... And who is the person who is most interested in Qassam rocket fire and a security escalation? Abu Mazen. The Palestinian 'rais' is caught in an election conundrum. He fears a Hamas victory, no less than he fears a victory of the young guard consisting of Barghouti and company. Only a cancellation of the elections will preserve his standing, and therefore an Israeli military operation will take the chestnuts out of the fire for him and serve as an excuse for him to cancel the elections.... Islamic Jihad, which is not participating in the elections, is celebrating with the Qassam rockets. Its patrons in Iran and Lebanon wish for a security escalation. With elections or without. They want the continuation of the armed struggle, and fantasize about a security zone in Gaza modeled after southern Lebanon. Israel faces a dilemma. A security escalation means intervention in the elections that will cause international criticism and lead to accusations of damaging the Palestinian democracy. A restrained response will project weakness. Therefore the response is measured, even restrained. In the meantime, as long as there are no fatalities and no other instructions -- the IDF is bombing the sand dunes

of Gaza and praying that the rain will overcome the Qassam rockets."

## II. "The Palestinians Against Fatah"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of Yediot Aharonot (December 25): " Hamas's might stands out saliently against the backdrop of Fatah's bankruptcy.... Free elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council are the principal legitimate expression of the deep change that has occurred in the Palestinians' political preferences. Delaying the elections will not change the reality itself, it would only allow the lie of Fatah's regime to exist for a little while longer. Until the explosion, which, at that point, will be inevitable."

## III. "Here Comes the Next 'No Partner'"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 25): "Israel has no status or power to create change [in Palestinian politics]. Israel lost it during the past year when it decided to ignore Mahmoud Abbas in the same way that it had ignored Yasser Arafat. Any gesture Israel seeks to make toward Abbas -- and it is not revealing any such intentions -- would be immediately interpreted as intervention in the Palestinian elections.... In response to Israel's unilateral step and policy of keeping the 'yes partner, no partner' option open, the Palestinian public (as opposed to its leadership) is making its own unilateral move in voting for Hamas.... No Palestinian leadership will be able to ignore the status of Hamas any longer.... Hamas wants to be Israel's next 'no partner.' This is the appropriate Palestinian national response in Hamas's perspective. Thus, the Israeli option will close for a long time, because anyone seeking a diplomatic process will have to talk with Hamas also. In the very same way, anyone seeking to neutralize Iranian nuclear weapons will have to talk with Ahmadinejad, and anyone wishing to strengthen the government of Lebanon will have to talk with Hizbullah. For someone who is not interested in a diplomatic process, it does not matter in any case whether Hamas or someone else controls the Palestinian Authority."

## IV. "Nowhere, Fast"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (December 26): "Palestinian politics is just starting to get interesting. Yet much of the world seems to be oblivious -- at least in terms of actual policy -- to the monumental changes taking place. Every day I read articles in newspapers, journals and other places which explain in lofty terms how Mahmoud Abbas and the moderates must be helped; how he needs to be encouraged to fight terrorism, and how what he really needs is a good socioeconomic policy. I say: Wake up and smell the olive oil! He cannot even prevent allies from being gunned down or kidnapped within five minutes of his house by dozens of armed raiders. For all practical purposes, it is already all over for Abbas. He may have deserved better, but after all, too, the Lord helps those who help themselves and Abu Mazen didn't fulfill that requirement. What is actually impressive is how alone he is. Every day more allies desert him.... Hamas and Barghouti, supposedly the people's saviors from a corrupt, inept Abu Mazen, are going to damage the [Palestinian national] movement even further."

## V. "Mubarak's Ultimatum"

The Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 26): "We Westerners are desperate to see the political systems in the Middle East evolve from authoritarian theocratic or oligarchical models to some variation of representative government. That desire suffered another setback on Saturday when former Egyptian presidential candidate Ayman Nour, 41, was sentenced to five years in prison for (what outside observers insist are trumped-up charges of) forgery.... So how far along is Egypt today -- after both a presidential and a parliamentary election -- on the road toward 'democracy?' Not very.... For genuine democracy to evolve, it needs to be nurtured. Until the West demands reformist policies throughout the region -- including a truly free press, accountable government and the kind of political socialization that could contribute to democracy's development -- it will be left to wonder why it must continuously choose between the autocrats and the Islamists."

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12. Iran: Nuclear Program:  
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Summary:  
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Prof. David Menashri, Director of the newly-established Center for Iranian Studies in Israel, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Israel shouldn't lend its hand to turning the issue of nuclear Iran into a problem that is entirely Israel's, or into something that necessitates an 'Israeli-made solution.'"

Block Quotes:  
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"Proper Awareness"

Prof. David Menashri, Director of the newly-established Center for Iranian Studies in Israel, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 27): "[Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's] extreme utterances ... could be useful in one key issue -- the nuclear one. Whether or not his attack against Israel was policy-induced, it might create the impression that Iran's nuclear policy is Israel's problem only. As far as [Ahmadinejad] is concerned, should his remarks be interpreted in this fashion, the Muslim world and Europe would be less keen to take steps against Iran's nuclear policy. However, Israeli counter-declarations do not contribute to solving the problem. Israel shouldn't lend its hand to turning the issue of nuclear Iran into a problem that is entirely Israel's, or into something that necessitates an 'Israeli-made solution.'"

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